THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 3, No. 6 June, 1964

This newsletter contains a departure from our regular form, which (some of you might agree) was in danger of becoming stereotyped. Our editorial department has been hardpressed these past several months and only by dint of much effort have we been able to get our newsletters out more or less on time. In spite of the fact that we did meet the deadlines, we have felt that the quality of our material, not to mention its content, was actually not up to the standard we had hoped to maintain.

With this issue we re-examine our editorial policies as they apply to the various departments we have been attempting to cover. The first innovation is the L.P. Review department, which in the past has been done in a very perfunctory manner, and even though we printed our reviews, we were not satisfied that they were fair both to the performer and to the reader. To remedy this situation, and commencing with this issue, we are pleased to print below, a L.P. Record review by Bob Ashforth.

We also hope to spell out in some detail our future policies as they apply to other departments. Perhaps it might be in order here to ask for volunteers who might from time to time, or on a regular basis, contribute short articles on a given specific subject. If any of our many qualified subscriber/members feel they have the time to donate in their own fields, we would be most pleased to hear from them. We were rather surprised to learn (mainly from the questionnaires sent out some time ago) that most of our readers are interested in only one phase of ragtime. These phases include buying sheet music to 1. own as a collector, and 2. use on the piano; listening to L.P. records only; buying player piano rolls only; reading books on the many fields of music; playing banjo ragtime, etc. Each of these phases can be further subdivided until a particular field becomes highly specialized and quite involved. We are open for suggestions (again). Our volume of mail generally speaking, is fairly high for our type of organization, we think, which indicates to us that our members are keenly interested, and also quite knowledgeable on the subjects about which they write. We are many times sorry that we cannot do justice to the many fine letters we receive. To remedy this we are prepared to turn over mail we receive to the person who has selected that particular field to review. We think that in this way we will be able to put together a more co-operative newsletter, and certainly our content will be considerably up-graded.

TREEMONISHA.

Those of the faithful who sent us their $15.00 cheques as long ago as February and March, and who have since no doubt been wondering whatever has become of us may put their minds at ease. At a special meeting held recently, the decision was made to proceed forthwith with the publication of this fine American Opera. The many letters which upbraided us for not carrying on at once with Treemonisha were of course taken into consideration, but the main factors involved were, like everything else, cost. We re-examined our cost figures, and were able to achieve some small savings by allowing the plate makers and printers to work at their own speed. The second factor was a few more subscriptions which came in bringing the total received to just over 50% of the total cost of printing.

The net result to those of you who are patiently waiting will be an additional wait, but the realization that the project will at last be fulfilled. We cannot state at this point how long a wait, but we have seen the first of the finished plates, and it looks as if we will have a reproduction which is up to our usual music standards. No printing has as yet been done. Finished results, as per our February '64 announcements should be sometime during the summer.

RAGTIME SOCIETY RECORDS.

Further work on producing records has been temporarily halted. This decision is the result of waiting too long....procrastination, the evil of volunteer groups. It would be the end of June, or into July before a record could be put on the market, and experience has shown that this is probably the poorest time of the year to launch a new venture. The big factor, however, was the decision to commit our meagre funds to the completion of the Treemonisha project.

What will now be done, you ask ? We hope to do the necessary organization and taping sometime during the summer months, and by September or October at the latest be in a position to announce that a record or records have been produced and are ready for mailing. Further pronouncements on the subject will not be made until that time.

SHEET MUSIC.

Florida Rag, by Geo. M. Lowry, as announced 2 months ago, is now ready for mailing. We have to date received 4 orders for this rag, which is a regrettable situation from our point of view. Obviously, we cannot continue to reprint sheet music on spec. or we would be out of business soon. Several alternative methods have been discussed, including a co-operative venture with The Ragtime Review of St. Louis, Missouri, which fine group must find itself in a situation similar to ours. We reason that with the publication of Max Morath's excellent "100 Best Rags", the field has been fairly well pre-empted. Notwithstanding this fact, however, we are wondering if there might not be a hard core of sheet music addicts, who might be willing to pay a fixed amount in advance, and be willing to receive a sheet of music as it is published. These would not be announced in advance, but we would be able to guarantee that our selection would not be available in print today, that is, would not be one of our previosly published numbers, nor contained in any of the ragtime folios available today, nor in Max Morath's book. There are a great number of excellent rags, amd our music library continues to grow. Also, Morath did not print all of Joplin, Scott and Lamb, not to mention the many composers who published one or two excellent rags. Our choice (which might be the result of a suggestion from you) would be a surprise. This selection might be one you already had, but we would take care not include the more popular ones, and at the same time ensure that musically speaking, the number would be worthwhile. For instance.....

SHEET MUSIC. (cont'd.)

In return for a $10.00 payment in advance, we would guarantee to mail individually about every month or 3 weeks a sheet of ragtime of the same quality as our 23 reprints to date. In this way we might provide 12 to 15 excellent reprints. These amounts are arbitrary and might be varied up or down.

The alternative, we feel, is to discontinue the high quality printing method we have employed so far, and revert to a 'one off' type of reprint, the cost of which would probably be greater than $1.00. This we are most reluctant to do for many reasons, not the least of which is the extra leg-work involved, not to mention of course, higher price and lowered quality.

Many of you have written in from time to time asking if we can copy a certain rag for them. Most of these requests were for numbers which we have in our library, but which for one reason or another we did not feel would make a worthwhile reprint. Now is your chance to let us know if you are still interested.

We are attaching a form which should be filled in and returned by anyone interested in the above. As with other projects, cheques are held for a period of time to ascertain interest, and would be returned if we do not proceed.

RETURN ENVELOPES.

We can't prepay the postage from outside Canada, but we can provide self-addressed envelopes for your use. Use the enclosed envelope whem writing us. Also, if you want to save a few cents don't use airmail postage. In spite of what the post office may tell you, in most cases, surface mail is faster from nearly all points in the U.S.A. However, from overseas, surface mail may take as long as five weeks, and airmail is preferable.

BOOKS.

THEY ALL PLAYED RAGTIME, in the Evergreen, Grove Press $2.95 edition is once again available from the Ragtime Society. We just couldn't get them for a while. Thanks to a tip from Edna Faye Peacock in Washington, we located a source, and have purchased a couple of dozen. Get them while they last... this is an out-of-print book. $ 2.50 postpaid from the Society.

The Reluctant Art, By Benny Green. The latest issue of the Jazz Book Club. It contains chapters on Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Lester Young, Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker.

Needed: a reviewer for new book releases.

BOB ASHFORTH.

To those of you who read the newsletters thoroughly, the name of Bob Ashforth will be recalled. Bob lives in Toronto, writes copy for a living, and in addition plays excellent piano. When most of us are stuck trying to struggle through an unfamiliar number, Bob sits down and reads it off. We think that Bob's combination of talent admirably fits him to the (to us) unenviable task of reviewing. We also think that he does remarkably well and that his reviews are right on the button. We plan on running one or more of Bob's record reviews every month, and this month are printing on pages 41 and 42 his review of Ann Charters latest record (which we just skimmed over in an earlier newsletter), and a "Personality Profile" of Mrs. Charters. These "Profiles" will also appear from time to time under the familiar time signature for ragtime :

NEWS FROM OUR MAILBAG

Ken Wilkinson writes from Grimsby, England that the new Mills Folio, Ragtime Piano is available in England for 10/-. This will ssve you a bit of money fellows.

We are indebted to Karl Leaf of Ventura, California who recently donated several excellent original ragtime numbers for our music library, among them Cucumber Rag, and Black Cat Rag, both fair ragtime numbers and worthy of future reprinting. Many thanks Karl. Karl can be heard most nights at Shakey's Pizza Parlour in Ventura. Karl, a musician all his life, has been a pianist for the past few years concentrating on ragtime. He was an arranger with Will Osborne's orchestra 1941-42, and played alto sax with Freddie Slack in 1943. From 1944 - 1958 he played tenor sax and bass clarinet in over 450 motion pictures, under contract with Universal Studios. Known as "Butterfingers", his picture is below.

Bob McGrath of Bellerose N.Y. suggests that a book of songs should be published to contain songs from the ragtime era that are not usually heard today, and goes on to say that Max Morath is perhaps the man to do this. Bob also tells us he'd like to hear more of Charlie Thompson's playing. One record we know of is the one Bob Darch put together including Eubie Blake, Joe Jordam and Charlie Thompson.

In Musigram, VOL 2, No. 2, an article by Russ Cole tells of persons and events contacted either in person or through correspondence. These include Charles Daniels, Joe Howard, Phil Baker and Charles K. Harris.

Tom Shea tells us of an interesting evening recently spent at Jimmy Ryans in New York, where Toni Parenti was holding forth. Toni played Grace & Beauty from a fading old piece of sheet music.

Performer Profile

Ann Charters

According to Ann Charters, the idea for 'A Joplin Bouquet' first occurred to her husband, Sam, on a moonlit December night in 1950 while he was riding a Greyhound bus from New Orleans to Pittsburgh. "It just struck me as the one way to do it," he remembers. "But it took me four years to find the right pianist."

He eventually found her on the West Coast in 1954: Ann and he were enrolled in the same music classes - Counterpoint and Harmony - at the University of California in Berkeley. Ann had studied classical piano for eight years before going to college and although she had read 'They All Played Ragtime,' she hadn't really encountered any of the music.

"The Blesh and Janis book first came out when I was in high school," she recalls. "I remember getting it out of the library, reading it through and finding the insert of Joplin's 'Maple Leaf.' I put the book on the music rack of our piano and tried the rag. It was hard to play because the book kept wanting to close."

Sam Charters, who had played ragtime with his own band in Sacramento - the 'Levee Loungers' - began to plan seriously with Ann for their recording venture. "Sam had collected a lot of the sheet music, both originals and photostats, and by late 1958 - thanks to Treb Tichenor, Russ Cassidy and Len Kunstadt - we had assembled all the rags we wanted to include in 'Joplin Bouquet' and 'Essay in Ragtime,'" Ann continues. "I was working on my M.A. in English Lit. at Columbia University and living at International House on Riverside Drive when I prepared the 'Joplin Bouquet.' We used the facilities at International House to record, including the concert Steinway."

The tapes from this two-day recording session were put aside until September of last year, when Sam and Ann Charters had the resources to start their own small recording firm - Portents - located on West 109th Street in New York. 'A Joplin Bouquet' is registered as PTS 1 on this new label and from Ann Charters comes the good news that "we plan to have more ragtime on Portents, along with other music."

RECORD REVIEW **from BOB ASHFORTH**

"A Joplin Bouquet" by Ann Charters:

Fig Leaf Rag	Heliotrope Bouquet
Rose Leaf Rag	Palm Leaf Rag
The Sycamore	Pleasant Moments
Sunflower Slow Drag	Weeping Willow
Euphonic Sounds	The Chrysanthemum
Gladiolus Rag	Maple Leaf Rag

Every serious ragtime enthusiast should own two things: first, a copy of "They All Played Ragtime" and secondly, Ann Charters' album, "A Joplin Bouquet." These two reference sources complement each other superbly; studied together, they tell the complete and fascinating story of classic ragtime.

Mrs. Charters cannot claim to be the world's finest piano artist, but she is the only classically-trained pianist to date with the skill, devotion and courage to record such an extensive concert program of classic ragtime.

In doing so, she has illuminated some rather dark corners. Her record stands as a clearly stated definition of what classic ragtime is - something which doesn't come along every day. It is also a masterful display of the true and surprising beauty of ragtime . . . the beauty which Joplin and Stark claimed was there, but which eludes so many performers today.

Almost without exception, Mrs. Charters plays each piece precisely as written, with the legato dance style so dear to the composer's heart. It is quite startling - and very pleasant - to hear such a wonderful range of expression applied to the scores, a welcome contrast to the driving, 'double forte' brand of entertainer's ragtime.

The liner notes accompanying this album say that "each piece was studied and performed with the same care that is usually given to a Chopin etude or a Mozart rondo." This is an honest statement; unfortunately, it does not apply to Mrs. Charters' other album: "Essay in Ragtime", Folkways 3563. (It can only be assumed that "A Joplin Bouquet" was recorded some time after the Folkways album and that, in the interval, Mrs. Charters attained both a marked technical maturity and a deeper appreciation for ragtime.)

It has often been said that there are many kinds of ragtime, ranging from pure classic through the entertainer's style to what might be called "Fractured Flickers" or "pie-throwing" music. In the current revival of ragtime, there is the danger that even a veteran enthusiast could go through life without having heard the true classic style; there is the equal danger of mistaking something which is less than classic ragtime for the real thing. For those who care about such things, "A Joplin Bouquet" clears up any doubts.

With this album, Mrs. Charters has made a sincere and valuable contribution to ragtime. She has said in music what Blesh and Janis said in words; more important, she has expressed what can never be put in writing: the true sound of classic ragtime. May her recordings multiply.

EARLY CAKEWALKS

THE ROOTS OF RAGTIME

By KAY C. THOMPSON

UNLIKE other forms of popular music, the earliest beginnings of which are lost to us in the mists of antiquity, jazz is unique for the reason that it alone originated within modern times, which is to say, within the past 250 years. Thus, it is entirely possible to account for the evolution of jazz, from Colonial days to the present, in terms of its actual growth and development. To be sure, some readers may object to this introductory observation, believing that conclusions about early jazz are "speculative" in the absence, for instance, of published sheet music prior, say, to the 1890s. However, since published sheet music is merely one of several useful aids, I fail to see why we should not look in other directions, for the truth be known, it is surprising how much material relating to early jazz is available today. Hence, for a description of the Negro cakewalks of a hundred years ago, based upon the evidence of qualified eye-witnesses of that now distant day, I need only to quote from a paraphrase of my own, appearing in the RECORD CHANGER for October, 1949:—

"In its earliest reported form, the cakewalk was an intricately executed walking step. It was danced some years before the Civil War. Couples formed a square, the men placing themselves on the inside. The music was played in a moderate march tempo, while the dancers strutted along, performing neat manoeuvres at each of the corners. One or more judges passed upon the talents of the competing couples, eliminating them by turn, until the remaining pair of entrants were declared to be the winners, in recognition of which they were awarded a large and impressive cake. Obviously, the dance acquired its name from this fact. Following the Civil War, a number of variations were devised, all of which were called cakewalks. While we are on the subject, it is fitting to mention that the word 'ragtime' is simply a shortened form of raggedy time, or ragged tempo, a term meaning syncopated. This abreviated form seems to have come into general use as a means of distinguishing cakewalks from other dance compositions in which syncopation was not as prominent a feature."

The foregoing information, all of which, as noted, can readily be confirmed, will explain why I have long regarded the pre-Civil War years as amongst the most formative ones of early jazz. Similarly, it will explain, once and for all, why I have long regarded it as a rum and perverse business to seek the origins of early jazz, in itself the most obvious kind of dance music, in the folk songs and shouts of the late 19th century, or weirder yet, in remote and implausible African sources. However, before we consider the early cakewalks in further detail, a few words about the plantation dances of the preceding Colonial period would not be out of place. As it happens, these dances furnished the prototype for those of the succeeding cakewalk era. In addition, they throw an interesting sidelight upon the manner in which the early Negro's contact with European music provided the principal impetus motivating the upward evolution of jazz, not only melodically and harmonically, but rhythmically as well.

JIGS

Of course, at the outset, any discussion of the plantation dances of Colonial times must commence with the fact that the early Negro arrival, on acquiring a new master, was usually allowed a brief interval in which to acclimatize himself. For one thing, after a painful voyage, he frequently needed to regain his health. For another, he was obliged to learn sufficient English to follow orders in the field. And for a third, to speed his integration within the plantation community, he was taught to dance, the first steps being simple ones, patterned upon traditional Irish jigs. Needless to say, the choice of jigs was an altogether natural circumstance, for jigs represent the basic dances from which all other social types have derived. I mention the matter, for prior to the renaissance of popular dancing in the 15th century, jigs were, in fact, the universal dance of Europe, being known in Italy as the *giga*, in France as the *gigue*, and in Germany as the *geige*. That, in later years, they came to be preserved in Ireland, to the point of being regarded as that country's national dance, can best be accounted for by Ireland's insularity, which, as much as anything else, precluded her participation in the events which subsequently produced the minuet, the quadrille, the waltz, the polka, and the schottische, to mention just a few.

FIRST NEGRO COMPOSITION

Owing to the fact that both types of dancing are rudimentary, there are more points of similarity between Irish jigs and African dances than there are between the latter and those of later jazz, and thus, the early Negro was able to assimilate Irish jigs with little or no difficulty. This being so, it is hardly a coincidence that the first Negro composition, appearing in the 1780s, the year our copyright office opened, should have been a jig-style tune. Indeed, this finding is precisely what one might expect. The point is, the later development of the first pre-Civil War cakewalks, from these inauspicious jig beginnings, was contingent upon the following: (1) the introduction of a more clearly defined conception of musical, or metronomic, time; (2) the development of broader tonal recognition, as exemplified by a diatonic scale; (3) an increased familiarity with elementary harmony, commencing with the tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords; and (4) the addition of formalities and refinements, borrowed from prevailing favourites, such as the minuet and the quadrille.

Obviously, all of the above features were of European origin, and not of African importation. Moreover, the circumstances attending their gradual introduction within the conventions of Negro dance music will, I think, be more plainly perceived, if we pause to consider that a sufficient interval had elapsed, by the time the pre-Civil War period opened, to allow for the appearance of a distinct Negro musical class. Necessarily, the emergence of such a class was an inevitable prelude to the development of a truly popular music from humbler folk forms. That such a class then existed, and that it had attained a relatively high degree of proficiency, is implicit in the fact that Negro musicians accounted for the bulk of all Southern dance music in the years preceding the Civil War. That they also wielded considerable influence in shaping the tastes of other Negroes is inherent in the fact that they occupied a position in the plantation hierarchy corresponding to that enjoyed only by the house-slaves. As a result, they were freer, as well as better equipped to contribute to the changing social patterns that dominated the cultural activities of the

Negro community as a whole. So much for early background, so much for time, place, motive and opportunity. Comes now the polka, which swept the United States in 1840, producing, in its wake, a flood of newly dotted fashions, not only in musical notes, but also in clothes, dress, and other forms of popular self-expression.

While it may be shown that the minuet and quadrille exercised a marked influence on early jazz, if only in a formal sense, the significance of the polka, in purely rhythmic terms, has long been overlooked. From the viewpoint of later jazz, the importance of the polka stems from the fact that it was a 3/4 dance written in 2/4 time. Thus, it furnished the precedent for ragtime's most characteristic rhythmic device, namely, its use of secondary rag, or three-over-four, as it is sometimes called. Briefly described, the polka consisted of three jumping (i.e. syncopated) steps, executed on the the first three counts of a four-count bar, the fourth beat constituting a rest, during which moment the toe of the unemployed foot struck the heel of its mate. Naturally, when improvised, the above routine was used with considerable flexibility. Nevertheless, from even this condensed description, it should be apparent that the polka embodied the polyrhythmic elements, within a Western time concept, that enabled a large generation of ragtime players to superimpose a syncopated treble on a regularly accented bass accompaniment.

How, then, would one distinguish between an early polka and a later rag, for decidedly, the two are very different things! In layman's language I would put the matter this way. whereas a polka was a syncopated 3/4 dance set to 2/4 music, a rag was a form of syncopated 3/4 music intended for the purposes of 2/4 dancing. In short, the latter might well be described as a highly creative inversion of the former, occurring, always, within the framework of previous cakewalk conventions, which, as we have seen, date back to the earliest Colonial times. This interpretation of what happened will, as I fully realize, cause further pain and anguish to our old friend, the African theorist. Therefore, I would like to submit that the finale of Scott Joplin's opera, **Treemonisha,** provides a particularly vivid demonstration of the manner in which a 19th century schottische may be converted into a later ragtime dance, or slow drag. In citing this instance, I do so for the reason that the schottische was a close cousin of the polka, and thus, I feel it more than vindicates the view that ragtime, as Joplin himself believed, belongs with European music.

WHAT IS RAGTIME?

In The Outlook of November 7 there appeared an editorial called "Primitive Folk Songs of Broadway" which contained what might be considered a just plea for a square deal to ragtime music.

As a pianist and teacher it has been my privilege to get in touch with the musical hearts of a great many classes of people (Americans *en masse*), and out of my experience I think I have gained a fair knowledge of what the real American wants in music. No one is better situated to discover the actual musical inclinations of America than the American music-teacher; I mean the teacher of average attainment, the one who deals with the average American. Alas! no one sees more clearly or feels more forcibly the musical demands of the people than those teachers who, like myself, have spent so much time and energy in trying to instill in them something they do not seem to want.

Just what ragtime is and why it lives is not easily told. It covers entirely that type of music referred to and cleverly designated by The Outlook as "Broadway folk songs." But the common conception of it is obscure and confused. A great many people, including (apparently) some of its composers, seem to think that it is merely another word for syncopation. That this is by no means true we shall see presently.

Ragtime seems to be going through a course of evolution. Its scope is becoming broader. Year after year an increasing variety of musical style is conveniently falling under this head. And it is gaining favor.

Perhaps the most vigorous objection voiced against ragtime comes from those who, by their loftier instincts, detest its favorite haunts, namely, popular dance halls, places of ill repute, cabarets, etc. Another serious objection is its frequent adaptation in vulgar and suggestive songs. In these, however, there is no just cause for its denunciation. Being sorely neglected among cultured folks, the outcast finds refuge among the rough and worldly, where it is, in truth, much abused.

Strictly speaking, I believe there is but one well-founded theoretical objection to ragtime, and that is the occasional excessive use of its peculiar kind of syncopation. Syncopation, by its stimulating effect, is pleasant when administered in well-regulated form. It is spice. But when taken to excess it overstimulates; it irritates. That which at first is dazzling in due time becomes tiresome. The listener will soon surfeit on syncopation. Admiration turns to disgust. It is gratifying to observe, however, that this one-time doubtful feature is gradually losing favor and promises to be eventually overcome. It is also a fact of significance that these over-syncopated songs are by no means the most successful.

Perhaps the best way to define ragtime and prove that it and syncopation are not necessarily analogous will be to go to the bottom of things and summon up some actual illustrations. In other words, deal with it in the concrete.

A short time ago Madame Schumann-Heink sang for the soldiers at Camp Meade, Maryland. Immediately after the applause which greeted her first appearance on the stage one of the soldiers called out: "Sing 'For Me and My Gal.'" This was merely one of the comedies of camp life, and no doubt amused the great singer as much as any one else. She declined with a smile, and said she would sing a beautiful French love song instead.

The boy knew what he liked and called for it. No doubt there were a great many more present who would have been delighted with the captivating rhythm of this now popular song.

"For Me and My Gal" is typically ragtime, yet it is practically free from syncopation—to be exact, there are just three measures of syncopated melody, those near the close of the chorus. The most striking example of all ragtime music came out a few years ago in Irving Berlin's song "Alexander's Ragtime Band." It may be interesting to note that this song was received in London and Paris with the same enthusiasm as in New York. Over a million copies were sold in Europe.

What made this song so popular? It was not syncopation, for there is no syncopation at all in the chorus, which is the most pleasing part of the song.

Ragtime songs like the following, "Are You from Dixie?" "Back Home in Tennessee," "I Want to Go Back to Michigan," "Yaaka Hula Hickey Dula," etc., owe their success to a certain peculiar enchanting rhythm, but not to syncopation.

HAROLD HUBBS.

Gleason, West Virginia.

The Outlook, circa 1916

The above article was contributed by Bob Evans of San Diego, California. The current series of reprints from Jazz Journal and the Record Changer were loaned to the Society by Mike Montgomery.